

DEPARTMENT OF STATE TELEGRAM

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FROM

AmEmbassy BUENOS AIRES.

CLASSIFICATION

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E.O. 11652:

TAGS:

SUBJECT:

GDS

PFOR, AR, US

Senator Helms Talks to President Videla

ACTION:

SecState WASHDC IMMEDIATE

~~SECRET~~ BUENOS AIRES 4429

LIMDIS

Ref:

Buenos Aires 4173

AMB
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1. Senator Helms and ~~ambassador~~ ^{staff} arrived in Buenos Aires July 3 (see reftel). Senator called briefly on Ambassador Hill that day and attended Bicentennial reception July 5 at Ambassador's invitation. Purpose of Senator's trip is not clear to us. He has indicated publicly that purpose is to look into "human rights." He mentioned another purpose to President Videla (see Para 2). We note, however, that he and his aides spent over two hours with Secretary of Commerce on July 5, an interview which would seem to have had nothing to do with either of purposes he has mentioned. (Appointment with Secretary of Commerce and all others were made by Senator himself without reference to the Embassy).

2. During July 5 reception, President Videla suggested

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Senator drop by his office for chat the next morning before latter's departure for Montevideo. Senator agreed to do so and went to Casa Rosada at 10 a.m. accompanied by Ambassador and DAO. After greetings were exchanged, Senator gave brief explanation of the purpose of his trip. He said he represented group of seventeen Senators who were "concerned about Communism" and he was visiting Chile, Argentina and Uruguay because their governments seemed to share desire to stand up to Communists. He told the Ambassador he was looking into the Egan killing at the hands of Marxist terrorists and intended to make an issue of it in the U.S.

3. President Videla responded that he shared the Senator's concern over the threat of Communism and that in Argentina it was perceived as a global threat in the economic, political, social and cultural fields as well as in a purely military sense. By the same token, the Argentine government is convinced that if the threat is to be defeated, it must be combatted by a global program directed at all aspects of the nation's daily life.

4. Senator Helms then referred to the U.S. presidential elections and briefly discussed each principal candidate. President Videla made no comment. Ambassador Hill emphasized to President Videla that he should rest assured that regardless of the outcome of the elections, Argentina could count on its many friends in the U.S. and that the USG,

whether under a Republican or Democratic administration, would continue in its desire to have the best possible relations with Argentina. The President said he hoped the electorate in the U.S. would be directed by God's guidance.

5. Senator Helms then brought up the subject of Argentina's image in the eyes of the world, and especially in the U.S., and suggested that a well thought-out public relations program could pay great dividends. He went on to clarify that he was not necessarily referring to a campaign in the U.S. press, but through various media, especially television, to reach the average citizen in the U.S. who, by his customs and traditions has values and goals very similar to Argentines. Visits by distinguished Argentines to the U.S. and their meeting with key communicators in the U.S. would be quite useful. General Videla responded saying that he was well aware of the importance of public relations and his government was now beginning such a program. In fact, the appointment of Ambassador Musich to his post in Washington is one step. Rather than base the program of words alone, however, he stressed that Argentina hopes to achieve better understanding and cooperation from foreign countries on the basis of real accomplishments at home. He also emphasized that he believed that the basic values of North Americans and Argentines were quite similar. The struggle with subversive elements in Argentina is to preserve those very

values and the Christian traditions of Argentina to permit the eventual return to truly representative and democratic government.

6. As the meeting drew to a close the President presented Senator Helms with a leather bound volume of the epic poem "Martin Fierro." Senator Helms expressed his gratitude for the gift and his appreciation for the opportunity to exchange views with the President. The visiting party departed at 1045 hours. At no time during the interview was the refugee problem discussed.

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